

Resource Materials  
for use with the video

# *The Family Meal*

*by Mickey Freeman*



*available from*

**Fanlight Productions**

4196 Washington Street

Boston, MA 02131

[www.fanlight.com](http://www.fanlight.com)

800-937-4113

*From William J. Doherty and Barbara Z. Carlson, **Putting Family First: Successful Strategies for Reclaiming Family Life in a Hurry-Up World.** Reprinted by permission.*

## **TIME FOR FAMILY MEALS**

Dinnertime was the centerpiece of the Graham family's life. High-energy conversations, good-natured teasing, everyone pitching in, time to linger before clean up --and the food wasn't bad either! They had their moments of irritation during dinner, but mostly you could tell that this family really liked being together and sharing a meal. Then the Grahams lost their family dinners without anyone even noticing.

Let's back up a bit before describing the decline and fall of the Graham family dinners. The family consisted of two employed parents and their three children, Jon (11), Nathan (9), and Lisa (7). Dad worked the early shift as a nurse and was home when the children got home from school. He was the main cook in the family. Mom, who was a teacher, did the grocery shopping and menu planning. The three children took turns setting the table and helping with clean up, and on Sunday mornings Nathan often made pancakes for the family. A high-energy clan, their dinners were a source of pride, a feeling that guests easily picked up on.

And then came competitive swimming. The kids must have received their mother's athletic genes, because they were all terrific athletes for their age. After several years of low-key swim teams, their parents moved them up to a more intense level that required three practices per week, a meet every weekend, and regular travel out of town. And of course their teams practiced on different days and at different times! The family's late afternoon and early evening schedule became a whirl of car rides, drop-offs and pick-ups. Except for Tuesday evening, when everyone was home, dinner became a pit stop. Dad left food in the refrigerator for the kids to pick up and chow down. Sometimes one parent and two children would eat together, but for the most part both parents were not together at dinner, and only on Tuesday (and Sunday) was there

the possibility of the whole family being together. Then Tuesday dinners were lost to a special band practice for Lisa, who was the most musical member of the family. Her parents did not want Lisa to miss out on an opportunity available only to a small number of children in the community.

Sunday dinners remained, but even there, something had been lost. High energy had ratcheted up a notch towards chaos as the children moved to and away from the table, complained more about the food, elicited more reprimands from the parents, and asked to leave the table as soon as they finished their food. The spirit was not the same.

Being a good friend of the family, Bill decided to ask everyone separately if they had noticed the change and how they felt about it. A year into this new schedule, the two older children said that they had not noticed the decline in the number of family dinners. When I pointed out that they used to have dinners as a family nearly all the time, and wondered if they missed them, Jon reflected a bit and said, "Yeah, I kind of like being together as a family." But then he added, "But I like just eating what I want to." Nathan was less positive, claiming that "It's boring eating as a family; I'd rather play one of my video games while I eat." Lisa didn't have much to say during my brief conversation with the children.

The mother, for her part, missed family dinners very much and worried about the family being on a fast treadmill. The father focused on how much the children were deriving from swimming, and how dedicated they were to it. He also stressed the quality time the parents had individually with the children in the car. And he mentioned that swimming was only six months of the year, a point that the mother countered by noting that soccer filled the rest of the year.

The Graham family is unusual only because the decline of their dinner ritual was so steep and fast. They are like many families nowadays, though, in having their dinner rituals erode without much notice or regret from most family members, although there is often one member,

the mother in this case, who feels the loss. If you are like the Grahams, we will offer ideas for reclaiming your family meals and making them connecting rituals. If you are not like the Grahams, we want to help you hold on to your meal rituals and enhance them.

## **WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL ABOUT FAMILY MEALS?**

Our bodies are designed by nature to get hungry at least three times a day. And we are social creatures who generally prefer to eat with others. (Think about how we apologize for eating food in front of someone who is not eating, and how we almost always invite that person to share our food.) All cultural practices and major religions in the world have meal rituals at their core.

Before we talk more about meal rituals, it's time for us to say what we mean by a family ritual. (Bill has a whole book on this topic, [The Intentional Family: Simple Rituals to Strengthen Family Ties](#).) Basically, a ritual is a coordinated activity that the family does over and over, and that has emotional meaning to family members. To qualify as a ritual, the activity must be repeated over time--from daily events like bedtime talks to an annual event like a vacation. The activity must be organized enough that people know when it is happening and how to act during it (think of birthday parties).

The difference between a routine and a ritual is that a ritual has the extra element of emotional significance. A routine would be how bathroom visits are organized every morning in a large family--repeated, coordinated, but not especially significant! A ritual would be a nightly bath a parent gives a young child, when they play and enjoy each other. Rituals can involve the whole family, sub-groups in the family (like one parent and one child), the extended family, or the family and its larger community.

Family meals are the central daily ritual opportunity in family life. At their best, they are an oasis in a hectic day, a time to reconnect, relax, discuss, debate, and laugh together. Family

dinners in particular are apt to be the only time during the day when the whole family has the chance to be together, face to face, doing the same activity and sharing in conversation. The rest of the time, we are mostly involved in solo or one-to-one activities. Family dinner rituals involve all three uses of family time that we discussed earlier:

- Being around, as we prepare meals, set up, eat our food, and clean up,
- Logistics talk, as we use the meal to catch up on what is happening on everyone's schedule, and
- Connecting talk, as we use the meal (at the best of times, anyway) to tell stories, to share opinions and feelings, and generally to get caught up on one another's lives.

Meal rituals are where the family culture is created and nurtured. It doesn't have to be dinner; we know families who have breakfast together and others who make a big deal of Sunday brunch. And a family who simply cannot have meals together might be able to create an equally valuable alternative ritual of family connection. But it's a challenge to create a viable substitute for the simple act of eating dinner together most days.

Earlier in the book we described research supporting the importance of family dinners. Children and adolescents do better in almost all areas of life when their families have regular dinners. Nutritionists have found that meals prepared at home mean better nourishment, lower fat diets, and less hurried consumption. Opinion polls reveal that the public believes in family dinners. But if almost everyone now agrees about the value of family dinners (and other meals), why do good families give them up and find it so hard to reclaim them?

## **FAMILY DINNERS: A MUCH-LOVED BUT ENDANGERED SPECIES**

The Graham family holds some of the clues to why family dinners are so difficult to pull off nowadays. Most families have dual-earner couples or single parents; in either case, one parent does not have a lot of time for meal planning and preparation. Then we over-schedule our kids in after school and early evening activities. Eager to support our children, we have come to believe that it is more important to watch a child's practice or game on the sidelines than to be home preparing a family meal. The result is that we eat in our cars or fast food restaurants, or we bring home food to be consumed at a kitchen counter as kids drop by.

Then there is what happens when we do sit down to eat together. The majority of American families have the television on during dinner--a sure way to sap connecting talk out of the air. When we put little special thought into family dinner rituals (because we are so harried and distracted), the food and the conversation become boring and routine, and thus easy to skip. Children and adults alike are bombarded every day with rapid-fire commercials and MTV-like entertainment as we hurry through our schedules. How can family dinners compete?

There is another reason it is so hard to have good family meal rituals, something fundamental in our culture. We live in a highly individualistic age, and we are raising our children that way. We tend to see ourselves as providers of goods and services to our children, to keep them happy and satisfied. Eroding is the idea that children are citizens of families and communities, part of the whole, with obligations and responsibilities as contributing members to their family and community. (Bill wrote about this theme in his book Take Back Your Kids: Confident Parenting in Turbulent Times).

What does this have to do with family meals? We think that many parents see themselves as food service providers rather than as leaders of a family dinner ritual. If you see the goal as simply to put food in the belly, then a family sit-down dinner is not necessary.

Furthermore, if your goal is to please your children as customers, then you don't want to make them give up some other activity in order to eat with the family, or even to eat something they don't prefer to eat that day. The striking thing about family meals in an individualistic, consumerist culture is that they require social conformity: you have to gather at the same time; eat more or less the same food; make conversation together rather than read, play video games or watch television; and finish at the same time. Sounds oppressive, doesn't it? McDonald's makes no such demands on its customers.

National Public Radio did a special on family dinners and their decline. The correspondent interviewed a sixteen-year-old girl about her family's dinner practices. She reported that her family rarely has dinner together, or any other meal for that matter. When asked why, she replied, without a trace of irony or negative emotion: "How can we be expected to eat together at the same time if we are not all hungry at the same time?" This is how the me-first, consumerist culture trumps family life. High-quality family dinners and other meals, where family members gather regularly for emotional and physical nourishment, are a counter-cultural practice in our contemporary world. Next we talk about how to take back your family meals from this world.

## **FINDING THE TIME FOR EATING TOGETHER**

For reclaiming family meals, our advice is simple but challenging for all of us:

- Make family meals a priority
- Be flexible
- Start from where you are

Priority comes first. If you are having more than four family dinners together per week, you are probably already making a place for family meals in your life. By the way, you should

count eating out together as a family dinner if you use the time for connection talk rather than just eating and running. See where our family stands by answering the questions in Table 3.1, which can help you track who is at family meals for a week. If you can't do that many dinners but add in breakfasts, weekend lunches or brunches, then you are already ahead of many other families. But if you feel you do not have enough times when everyone in the family is together for a meal, then the first step is to diagnose the problem. Is it adult schedules or children's schedules? Too much individual pickiness about what people will eat? Fatigue or burnout in the chief cook? Have you drifted way from family meals for other reasons? The key is how badly you want to restore them. Only you can know that. The Graham family will have to start there: how badly do the parents want to restore their rich tradition of family dinners?

If you are sure you want to find time for family meals, then the next principle is to be flexible. In one busy family with four active children and a father who gets home late from work, the mother decided to feed the kids a snack early in the evening and have dinner at 8:00 p.m. every night. Everyone was home by then, no one had starved, and most of the busyness was over for the day. Another family is even more flexible. Here are the mother's words:

We eat late - sometimes very late. We used to joke that we ate when one of my son's friends went to bed. At the time my son was nine years old and his friend went to bed at 8PM. Now, we joke that we eat when his friend's parents go to bed - sometimes as late as 10PM. My son is now 17 years of age.

Does the time of the meal matter? Not to me, as long as we all eat together. And with high school activities planned all around the dinner hour, before and after, we don't squeeze the dinner hour to accommodate each person's schedule. The kids eat a mini-meal when they get home. But we eat dinner and relax around the dinner table and have even more things to share.

Besides, one of the best pieces of advice my Mom gave me is that it doesn't count when dinner is, just as long as it is before Midnight.

You can also be flexible in your expectations for what you serve. If a family dinner means a five-course meal, then busy parents will throw in the dishtowel pretty quickly and settle for take-home pizza in the living room in front of the television. The key is the conversation and the togetherness, not the menu.

Another way to be flexible is to add more cooks to the kitchen. In a family where Mom was getting pretty fried with cooking by herself, and tending to just have everyone reheat leftovers for themselves, the solution was to get Dad and the teenagers involved in owning certain meals during the week. Dad took Sunday nights and each teenager took one night during the week. The deal was that the cook also chose the menu, which meant that the nutritional pyramid (especially fruits, vegetables, and grains) wasn't adhered to every night. But more people involved in the chore part of meals meant the restoration of an important family ritual. A mother named Kathy likes to say that she gets very tired of running "Kathy's Country Kitchen," especially when the customers complain all the time. Kathy's family needs to absorb a core principle of family rituals: in general, the more people involved in putting on a ritual, the higher the quality of the ritual for everyone--and the more likely you are to do it regularly.

Our third piece of advice is to start from where you are. If your husband travels during the week, have dinner rituals with your children on weekend days and go all out on weekends when the whole family is present. Jo Ann, a single mother with a 16-year-old son who has a job and a car, became aware that she missed having dinners with him. Indeed, eating together at any time was a chance event. Sometimes she did not feel like she lived in a family with her son, since they had no regular contact. Jo Ann approached her son with the idea of setting aside one

evening per week for a mother-son dinner. He was fine with the idea, and they decided to carve out Thursday evenings from other obligations for their meal. They discussed in advance what to have, the son helped to prepare it, and they had a leisurely connecting dinner together.

Jo Ann had the good sense to start small, rather than propose eating together every night or telling her son to change his work schedule. And you can be sure that they both knew why they were there on Thursday nights. It was not just a feeding opportunity for two; it was a dinner ritual whose purpose was emotional connection between a mother and her son. Family meals tend to disappear gradually over time; they can be restored the same way, especially if they are made special in ways we will talk about next.

### **MAKING MEAL RITUALS WORTH HAVING: CONNECTION TALK**

By this point, you might be saying to yourself: Give me a break! Have you been to my house recently for dinner? Togetherness? Conversation? How about boredom, complaining, and irritability? Indeed, there are good reasons besides schedules why families drift away from family dinners and keep the television on when they do have them. As we mentioned before, we are a culture of speed and entertainment with a diminishing capacity for low-key hanging out together. A sense of emotional significance in family meals does not come automatically from sitting down at the same table together. We have to be intentional with our meal rituals in order to keep them fresh over the years. (Table 3.2 has a number of questions you can ask yourself about what goes into the different phases of meal rituals in your family.)

Since the heart of a meal ritual is conversation, let's start there. Logistics talk tends to take care of itself, with low key conversation about who was involved in what activity that day, what is planned for tomorrow or next week, and announcements about being careful with the

front step that is beginning to crack. The only problem with logistics talk is if it dominates entirely, there is no room for connection talk.

Recall that connection talk mostly takes the form of stories, feelings, opinions, and humor. Some families we know are quite intentional about connection talk by beginning every meal with a "check-in: everyone mentions the best thing that happened to them that day and the worst thing. Even very young children can participate in this kind of connection ritual. The check-in can then be a springboard for further conversation about what is going on in one another's lives.

Other families are less structured but nevertheless make efforts to have connecting talk during meals. When his children were growing up and paying more attention to the world around them, Bill liked to bring up events in the news. He would sometimes mention them to his wife Leah and then ask the children if they had an opinion. For example, he might note that the new tobacco settlement banned outdoor cigarette advertising, which meant that the cartoon figure Joe Camel would be disappearing from public view. He would then ask the children if they were familiar with Joe Camel. Of course they were familiar with Joe Camel--all kids were, they replied. That gave him the opening to ask them what they thought about that advertisement, about smoking and its effects, about how many kids they knew at school who smoked, and about what effect they thought the ads had on kids. He would express his own opinions along the way, but the conversation was a give-and-take rather than an adult lecture about the evils of smoking.

Barbara remembers similar conversations with her four children about the non-chaperoned spring break vacations that seniors at the local high school took every year to Cancun, Mexico. These annual opportunities for sex, drugs, and rock and roll were big news in the community. Long before her children were seniors, Barbara and her husband had dinnertime conversations about what they and the children thought about these events. As the kids got

older, these conversations were opportunities to talk about what alcohol does to the judgment of young people. Again, not a lecture but a conversation in which the parents had the opportunity to listen and to share their values. By the way, none of Barbara's four children even asked to go Cancun as seniors.

We don't mean to imply that most dinner conversations have to be about heavy topics. They can also be about baseball, the family dog, grandma's health, parents' childhood memories, and who got scared by the thunder and lightning storm last night. The key is that there is a chance for everyone to get involved in his or her own way. (Table 3.3 gives you some fun conversation starters and table 3.4 lists several resources that contain thought-provoking questions.)

Connecting conversations can also go wrong. One mistake some parents make is to grill their children: What did you do today? What do you think of your math teacher? I saw your friend Lisa smoking outside the mall yesterday--were you aware she smokes? Especially as they approach adolescence, kids tend to hate feeling cross-examined by their parents, and will give one-word answers. It's generally a mistake to pursue them at these moments. An additional mistake is to make conversation-stopper comments when children open up, for example, when your twelve year old daughter says she hates math, a meal is not the time for admonishing her about her attitude or about how our society needs more women scientists. Another core principle of family rituals: minimal conflict. Almost every disciplinary matter, except kids hitting or throwing food at the table, can wait until after the meal ritual.

### **MAKING FAMILY MEALS WORTH HAVING: BEING CREATIVE**

Okay, you say: I'm convinced that family meals (especially dinners) are important, that I should be flexible in setting them up, that I should start from where we are, and that I should be intentional about the conversations we have during meals. But where's the fun and the

spontaneity? That's what we talk about now. But first, we want to stress that being creative does not mean that you become the entertainment director on the family cruise ship. Family meals are not a show that you put on for your family, followed by an applause meter or evaluation forms. There is great value in staying committed to regular family meals even when elements of boredom and fatigue set in. Family rituals, like the rest of life, have peaks and valleys, periods of intense enjoyment followed by periods where you look around the table and fantasize about being anywhere else than with this ungrateful, unruly batch of offspring and this detached or critical mate. But, as the saying goes, 80 percent of success in life comes from just showing up, whether you feel like it or not that day.

That said, we should put at least as much creative energy into our family meal rituals as we do into picking our wardrobes or enjoying our favorite hobby or planning a long-awaited vacation. We put spices in our food, don't we? Why not put spice in our meal rituals? Here are some spice ideas we have gathered from our own experience and those of other families. More ideas can be found in Table 3.5.

- Modify the environment. The Doherty's like to light a candle, lower the lights with a dimmer switch, and put soft music on the in background. This creates "ritual space," where family members enter a different mood than they had been in before. The effect is to sooth the hyper beast in all of us.
- Barbara sometimes would announce that Carlson dinner tonight would be held under the table! All hands under deck! Other times it would be in the tree house or in the year or at the beach.
- If you live in a cold climate where you cannot picnic during the winter, have a picnic on a blanket in front of the fireplace. Barbara did that with her family when she

thought a change of scenery was in order. It's fun to roast marshmallows on an indoor fire.

- Make one dinner a week really special. Here is the story from one family, told in the mother's (Sue) words:

I don't cook on Thursday nights! While we typically shared all our evening meals together, they seemed like a chore and uneventful. Last New Years, I got organized and finally cleaned off the dining room table for a special family dinner that we planned for just the four of us. We hadn't eaten in there in over ONE year!! While the meal itself wasn't particularly special, we dressed the table with a festive tablecloth, napkins, napkin rings, candles, good china & glassware, etc. We enjoyed it so much, I suggested we eat in there once a week. Then to my surprise, my husband suggested that he and the kids take turns preparing the meal. What a deal!! Each week, they plan their menu and I grocery shop for it. Sometimes it's Mac n Cheese or Chicken Noodle Soup. Who cares? But we still eat it in the Dining Room with the good china....We are proud to see our kids take some control and gain confidence in the kitchen.

- Have the kids make place mats for the table. This is guaranteed to improve their attentiveness to what is happening at dinner.
- Have an occasional alphabet meal, where all the dishes begin with the same letter. Have it a home or as a picnic in the yard or at a park.
- Have a breakfast meal for dinner. When Bill was out of town, his wife Leah would sometimes prepare Danish pancakes for dinner for herself and the children. Novel food tends to create a fun mood.

- Go all out when you eat take-home food. One family sometimes does the table cloth, the good dishes, candles--the whole works--when they do take-home Chinese out of cardboard containers.
- Take advantage of weekend brunch opportunities for playful meal rituals. One father remembers with fondness how his own father used to take special orders for pancakes on Sunday mornings, each in the form of a cartoon character of a child's choice--Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, you name it and Dad would make it. When the grown-up children return home with their own children, what do you think they ask for on Sunday mornings?

We are inspired with the stories we hear from families who use their creativity and persistence to make dinners and other meals the cornerstone of their family time together. We understand the powerful forces that keep many families from breaking bread together. But we believe deeply that for most families, the first beachhead in the battle to reclaim family life is their meal rituals. Make your stand here if you can. Be committed and flexible, accept where you are starting from, develop your skills in family conversation, realize that there will be dry times, and have some creative fun along the journey. In this way, you will pass along an important family tradition to your children when they have families. As we know from our own personal experience, your children will be grown up before you turn around twice, and you will be thankful that you nurtured and preserved your family culture by dedication to your meal rituals.



## **Table 3.2**

### **The Crafting of Family Dinner Rituals: Questions to Ask Yourself**

#### **I. Advance Preparation Phase**

- How are decisions made about which foods to purchase? Maximum input best, and joint participation in purchasing.
- How are predictability and novelty combined in purchasing food?
- How is food stored and made ready for meal preparation? Harder to ritualize meals when no one has planned for what will be served.

#### **II. Transition Phase: Getting Ready and Getting Seated**

- Who prepares the meal, sets the table?
- Principle: the more participation, the more enjoyment
- Is the environment prepared for family time--TV off, newspapers removed, chairs arranged? Enhancements such as candles?
- When is the meal served? Predictability helps, but flexibility necessary.
- How are family members called to the table? Minimal struggle?
- Who is present? Do some come late, absent themselves?

#### **III. Enactment Phase: The Meal Itself**

- Is the environment conducive to connection and conversation?
- How are family members seated?
- What kinds of food are served? How are family members' preferences balanced? Are there special foods sometimes?
- Are interruptions permitted, such as the phone?
- What topics of conversation are encouraged?
- What kinds of conversation are discouraged, e.g., discipline?
- Who participates in the conversations? Shared versus dominated?
- How are table manners and food preferences handled? Minimal struggle best.

#### **IV. Exit Phase: Leaving the Table and Cleaning Up**

- Is the end of the meal ritual clearly defined, everyone leaving together?
- Who participates in clean up?

## Table 3.3

### Resources for Conversation Starters

**If - Questions for Teens** by Evelyn McFarlane and James Saywell (Villard)

**Would You?** Questions to Challenge Your Beliefs by Evelyn McFarland  
(Villard)

**Give It Some Thought** Quotes to Remember & Questions to Ponder  
By Bret Nicholaus & Paul Lowrie (New World Library)

**What Would You Do?** Dilemmas by James Saywell and Anne-Marie Raffi  
(Perigee)

**Think Twice** An Entertaining Collection of Choices by Bret Nicholaus and Paul  
Lowrie (Ballantine Books)

## Table 3.4

### Conversation Starters for Mealtimes

- If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go and why?
- Would you rather be a Jeep or a Porsche and why?
- Why doesn't glue stick to the inside of the bottle?
- Talk about your favorite family trip and why it was your favorite.
- Each person talk about the worst thing that happened today, and the best thing!
- If you were given \$500 to do anything you want, what would you do?
- If you thought a stranger was following you, what would you do?
- If there was a fire in our home, what would you do?
- If you could meet any person in the world, who would it be and why?
- If you could meet someone from history, who would it be and why?
- Who is your favorite hero and why?
- What is your favorite television show and why?
- What is your all time favorite movie and why?
- What do you value most about yourself? What would you like to improve on?
- Of what moment are you most proud?
- What was your most embarrassing moment?
- Would you rather have a party with a few friends or lots of friends?
- If you could have a whole day off from work or from school, what would you choose to do with that time?
- If our family wanted to do a service project together, what would you like to do?

## Table 3.5

### Tips for Family Fun Memorable Moments at Meals

- When meals seem ho-hum, try eating in a different place - under the table, on a picnic blanket in front of the fireplace, in the treehouse, out in the yard or at a park.
- Keep a running list on the refrigerator door of topics to talk about at dinner. Everyone adds to the list.
- Make your history come alive - study your heritage and find recipes from your ethnic background. Have the children do the research, help with the shopping, cook the meal, make placemats and name cards that fit your country.
- Have a theme night. Go to the library and find books about many different countries. Prepare a meal from that culture and report on your research.
- Pray before every meal if that is part of your faith and hold hands while you pray.
- Take the children with you when you do the grocery shopping and let them choose an item for the local food shelf.
- Involve children in the meal, no matter their age - very young can set the table, older children can cut vegetables and open cans, preteens and teens can be involved in the planning, shopping, cooking and even be in charge of the entire meal. EVERYONE helps with clean up.
- Make mealtimes special with candles, the good dishes and a tablecloth. Eat in the dining room.
- Have a regular family night such as pizza night or taco night and watch your favorite family television show.
- Picnic in front of the fireplace and roast marshmallows.
- Make smores in the fireplace or the microwave. (A roasted marshmallow and a piece of chocolate squished between two graham crackers.)
- Have an all one-color meal. Everything must be green or red etc. Get creative!
- Have an alphabet meal. Choose one letter and all food items must begin with that letter. For example: "P" = peanut butter sandwiches, purple juice, plums, popcorn, pretzels, pears, pigs in a blanket etc.
- Read Dr. Seuss' book "Green Eggs and Ham" and then make them for dinner.

- Find a book that teaches about the food pyramid and have the family work hard to follow it.
- Take a field trip and create something delicious with your bounty. Applesauce or pie from the trip to the apple orchard. Jam from the strawberry farm. Baked seeds from the pumpkin patch.
- Buy a white tablecloth to use at each special holiday meal. Use permanent markers for each family member to write or draw something that they are grateful for. Be sure to date each drawing and add a new thought each year.
- Occasionally change places at the table and let everyone have a chance to be at the head.
- End the meal with a dessert project. Frost cupcakes, decorate cookies, make ice cream or sundaes and then eat them!
- Go on a \$2.00 date. Everyone gets \$2.00 to find the best dinner value.
- Have a special method to call the family to dinner: ring a bell, hit a gong, play a song on the piano, sing a gathering song.
- When children are grown and out of the house, create Sunday Family Dinner - anyone who is in town is invited to gather. Don't forget to invite grandparents.
- Paint secret messages on a piece of bread with milk mixed with food coloring. Toast the bread and the message magically appears.
- Use your daily meal to celebrate EVERYTHING! ....a good job in school, Mom or Dad's promotion, a clean bedroom, a lost tooth, every holiday from Arbor Day to Zeus Day.